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*Together to Help
One Another*

MEDIA RELEASE:

NEW SAFE HOME OPENS DOORS TO SUPPORT SEXUALLY EXPLOITED YOUTH

Honouring the Spirit of Our Little Sisters Creates Hope and Opportunity for Vulnerable Children and Youth

For Immediate Release: Winnipeg – November 10, 2003

At today's grand opening ceremony to launch Winnipeg's newest safe house for sexually exploited youth, the Ma Mawi Wi Chi Itata Centre along with community partners and tri-level government representatives gathered to celebrate the opening of a long awaited resource for at-risk youth.

Called '**Honouring the Spirit of Our Little Sisters' (HSLs)**, the home provides support and a place of safety for adolescent females and transgendered youth between the ages of 13 – 17 who are currently being subject to, or at risk for continued sexual exploitation.

Josie Hill, Ma Mawi Executive Director began the day's event by acknowledging the community support that exists for the benefit of at-risk and vulnerable youth. "The opening of this facility marks an important event in our community, as many partners have come together to achieve a shared vision of support and empowerment for societies most vulnerable children and youth," said Hill. "We are so grateful for the vision and commitment demonstrated by our funders and both the Interagency and Advisory Committees in working to protect and stop the continued exploitation of our kids."

"Honouring the Spirit of Our Little Sisters truly reflects the will and determination of the Ma Mawi Wi Chi Itata Centre to provide our vulnerable youth with the services and supports they need to protect them from the harsh life on the streets," said Anita Neville, MP for Winnipeg South Centre, who took part in the grand opening on behalf of the Honourable Claudette Bradshaw, Minister of Labour and Federal Coordinator on Homelessness. "We must continue to work together to prevent our children from being sexually exploited and abused by others," she said.

"We are pleased to support the efforts of Ma Mawi Wi Chi Itata Centre, as together we are strengthening children and families and helping youth to make healthy choices and avoid exploitation," said Christine Melnick, Manitoba Minister of Family Services and Housing, who also participated in the opening ceremony. "We are committed to working with local groups to ensure our programs are effectively protecting children and youth who are at-risk, as their safety and security is paramount.

Also on hand was Winnipeg Mayor Glen Murray, who reflected on the need for community-based solutions, and the role Ma Mawi plays in building a healthy community. "I am always encouraged by Ma Mawi's continued activities. The Centre continues to proactively determine where needs exist and to provide outreach and support in this community. There is nothing more important than protecting our children and helping them to grow up in a healthy and safe environment."

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Jackie Anderson, HSLs Site Manager wrapped up the event, speaking on behalf of community partners, staff and the HSLs Advisory Committee. “Working together as a community, we have created a home where youth will benefit from comprehensive holistic programming in a safe, welcoming and respectful environment. This approach recognizes the inherent and essential role of family and community in the healing and support that builds on their gifts, strengths, self-esteem, self-identity and confidence to care for one another,” she concluded.

‘Honouring the Spirit of Our Little Sisters’ is a 24-hour, 7 day-a-week, six-bed home. Program offerings include the provision of family group decision making, cultural opportunities, education, employment, training, mentoring, life skills and volunteerism. Funding is provided through Winnipeg Housing and Homelessness Initiative and Manitoba Family Services and Housing. The Manitoba Metis Federation also provided additional financial support.

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For more information, contact:

Michelle Boivin, Director of Communications
Ma Mawi Wi Chi Itata Centre
925-0333 / 797-6429



BACKGROUND INFORMATION:

Ma Mawi Wi Chi Itata Centre:

The Ma Mawi Wi Chi Itata Centre was established in 1984 by the Aboriginal community to serve the Aboriginal community living in Winnipeg. The name Ma Mawi Wi Chi Itata translates from the Ojibway phrase "we all work together to help one another". These words reflect our Vision of the concepts of collective responsibility and reciprocity toward helping each other.

Ma Mawi Wi Chi Itata mission is to create prevention and supportive based services and resources for Aboriginal families living in the city of Winnipeg for and by Aboriginal people.

For further information, contact:

Michelle Boivin
Director of Communications
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(204) 925-0333 or (204) 797-6429

Inter-Agency Committee:

Comprised of organizations supporting youth and have an investment and commitment to the growth, development and protection of youth. Members include:

Andrews Street Family Centre
Circle of Life Thunderbird House
Community Economic Development Association
Elizabeth Fry Society of Manitoba
Iskewak Leadership Development Institute
Mother of Red Nations Women's Council of Manitoba
Neecheewam
Ndinawe Endawaad
Native Women's Transition Centre
New Directions
Little Red Spirit
Macdonald Youth Services
Rossbrook House
Sage House
Wahbung Abinoonjiiag
Winnipeg Police Services
Winnipeg Regional Health Authority

HSLs Advisory Committee:

To support the development of Honouring the Spirit of Our Little Sisters, an Advisory Committee of five experiential women provided guidance and direction to ensure the relevance of programming, site and staff selection, home décor and overall infrastructure that is consistent with the needs of young women and transgendered youth accessing the service.



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Winnipeg Housing and Homelessness Initiative:

The Winnipeg Housing and Homelessness Initiative (WHHI) is a three-year, multi-million dollar partnership established by the governments of Canada, Manitoba and the City of Winnipeg to address declining housing stock and homelessness, in designated inner city neighbourhoods in Winnipeg.

The provincial component of the WHHI is part of the province's Neighbourhoods Alive! urban revitalization strategy. This recognizes that affordable, good quality housing is a key component of healthy neighbourhoods and that housing rehabilitation is an important part of urban revitalization and community economic development.

The WHHI provides "single window" access by local community organizations to a number of federal, provincial and City programs, including Neighbourhood Housing Assistance and housing repair programs administered by the Housing Division, such as the [Residential Rehabilitation Assistance Program](#).

The WHHI office is located at:

Winnipeg Housing and Homelessness Initiative
361 Hargrave Street
Winnipeg MB R3B 2K2
Phone: 940-3070

Manitoba Family Services and Housing:

In December 2002, the Manitoba government launched an action plan to help get children and youth who are sexually exploited, or those at-risk, off the street. The plan, funded through Healthy Child Manitoba, focuses on offering shelter and treatment, intervening to take children out of dangerous situations and seeking incarceration for adults who sexually exploit children. The plan includes support to:

- Establish a safe house to provide a doorway to change for children and youth who are sexually exploited;
- Provide additional outreach workers to get youth and children off the street;
- Create a service team co-ordinator to better co-ordinate services for high-risk children and youth; and
- Provide additional specialized foster care resources.

Manitoba's action plan is being implemented by a multi-jurisdictional committee that includes community representatives. This group co-ordinates resources and activities between government departments and the community, to achieve maximum effectiveness.